



## Is Thirst Enough?

**Did you know that water** loss as small as 1-2% of body weight stimulates thirst? Thirst is our body's **natural regulator of hydration** and we need to pay attention to this mechanism. But when we recreate, or get busy with school or work, we tend to ignore that urge to get a drink, thinking we'll get it later. And then we get distracted and the urge disappears. Or maybe we can't find a convenient place to get a drink of water. We know that soda and other sugary drinks sold at the concession aren't the best choice. Is it really that important to drink water? And why?

**Let's look closer at reasons why water** is so important to maximizing our health. Our body is more than 60% water and a major constituent of cells, tissues and organs. Water constantly passes in and out of cell membranes as the principal solvent in our bodies, transporting nutrients, enzymes and hormones into and out of our cells. Water helps flush toxins from our vital organs and provides a moist environment for ear, nose and throat tissues.

**Water helps prevent overheating** during physical activity through **heat loss in the form of sweat**. Adults sweat about 2 cups of water daily, but this increases with vigorous physical activity or hotter temperatures. Our skin helps in temperature regulation, where sweating and heat exchange take place. The cardiovascular system regulates blood flow to shunt heat from our body's core, to the surface. The sweat we produce evaporates and cools.

**Dehydration reduces exercise performance**, as it decreases time to exhaustion and increases internal temperatures. As our heart rate increases with intensity, we become even more dehydrated.

**We "turn over" about 5-10% of our body H<sub>2</sub>O** through breathing, perspiration and elimination. We can restore our water balance by consuming beverages and foods containing water. Drinking to satisfy thirst and striving for at least 8 glasses of fluids a day are two ways to make sure we stay hydrated. But who might need even more? Those who exercise strenuously, are spending extended periods **outside during hot weather**, or when taking certain medications. Ask your pharmacist about how much water you need to drink with your medications. There is still one more "risk factor" for dehydration, and that is alcohol consumption, which inhibits water conservation resulting in frequent urges to urinate. A good rule of thumb is to drink 2 glasses of water for every alcoholic drink you consume and practice moderation to avoid the effects of dehydration.

**Water straight from the tap here in Missoula** has zero calories, is virtually free and tastes great! A reusable water bottle is a great way to stay hydrated and to protect the environment. Staying well hydrated may help prevent **headaches, fatigue** and **afternoon hunger attacks**. Pay heed to your thirst, but remember that thirst is not always enough to keep us perfectly hydrated. Grab the drink that is a true cup of cheer, good clear water!

**Eat Smart Program-Missoula City-County Health Department**  
**Questions or comments? Contact Rebecca Morley, MA**  
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